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Letter from the Editors

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani woman and advocate for the right to education, courageously stood up to her Taliban attackers when she continued to attend school in Pakistan after the Taliban had restricted education for women. As a young teenager, Malala had spoken and written publicly on her life under Taliban rule in Pakistan, receiving a nomination for the International Children's Peace Prize by Desmond Tutu for her work. In 2012, Taliban gunmen entered a school bus asked for Malala by name and shot her three times. Surviving this assassination attempt Malala continued to fight for the right to education and the rights of young people and on December 10, 2014, she was recognized for her work with the Nobel Peace Prize; Malala Yousafzai was just seventeen at the time, the youngest Nobel Prize Laureate ever.

Despite widespread condemnation for Malala's attackers, in the summer of 2015 Reports indicated that eight out of ten of Malala's attackers were acquitted in a secret trial although earlier reports noted that they had received twenty-five-year sentences. All ten men had confessed their guilt to Pakistani police but were released by the police citing lack of evidence. The trial, which was held in secret with little transparency, means that we will likely never know what transpired and why Malala was denied the justice she deserved.

Malala's journey represents not only the need for human rights protection, but also for accountability for human rights violations. Ensuring human rights requires both proactive defense mechanisms as well as reactive accountability mechanisms. In Malala's case, she was provided with neither protection nor accountability. Malala remains a symbol of defiance against those seeking to undermine the basic rights of the most vulnerable populations across the globe; however, the failings in affirmative human rights protections and reactive human rights accountability demonstrate a continued need to focus on the rights of the vulnerable and to effectively respond to those who seek to violate those rights.

Malala's story is indicative of a troubling global trend in human rights. Failures to prevent human rights abuses are too often accompanied by failures to hold violators accountable for their actions. By freeing eight of the ten attackers, Pakistan indicated to the world that it did not truly value the need for accountability. The decision to not provide meaningful justice for the assassination attempt underscores the lack of respect for human rights in Pakistan.

Throughout the world, this tragic cycle repeats. States fail to protect vulnerable communities against human rights attacks and then fail to provide accountability and justice, thus indicating a lack of serious commitment to preventing the human rights abuse. Ensuring human rights is not simply about protecting vulnerable populations; it is also about ensuring justice and accountability. States that provide justice and accountability for human rights violations are states that are protecting their vulnerable populations. Protecting human rights is both reactive and proactive.

The *Human Rights Brief* has always been a student-run publication, and in the first issue of Volume 22 we highlight the excellent work of our dedicated staff, many of whom focused on

situations around the world in which states are not protecting the rights of vulnerable groups by either failing to proactively enact measures protecting the rights of those groups or failing to provide reactive accountability mechanisms. For example, in this issue we analyze the rights of unaccompanied children from Mexico, accountability for torture in the Philippines, the right of political participation in Armenia, property rights of indigenous populations and due process of minority prisoners in Ethiopia, the right to work and right to property of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and the right to water in the United States.

Together, these insightful pieces emphasize the need to push for stronger proactive measures defending human rights as well as efficient and meaningful ways to provide accountability for unfortunate abuses. As human rights lawyers and defenders, it is essential to draw inspiration from across the globe. We hope that each piece in this issue of the *Human Rights Brief* will inspire our readers to take action in defense of human rights; to stand up for the rights of vulnerable groups and to demand more from our governments in response to each and every violation of human rights. For current coverage please visit hrbrief.org where we update daily on cutting edge human rights issues.

Chris Keeler & Whitney-Ann Mulhauser
CO-EDITORS IN CHIEF

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